
DOXA: Yodok Stories – May 24

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Yodok Stories

Director: Andrzej Fidyk, Norway, 2008, 82 minutes

Sunday May 24 | 6:30PM | Pacific Cinémathèque

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Canadian Premiere

In North Korea, the human capacity for cruelty has entered bizarre new territory. The Yodok concentration camp houses more than 200,000 men, women and children, who are considered class enemies by the state. Entire families are sent to the camp, if even one member is suspected of seditious activity or thought. George Orwell, at his bleakest, could not have conceived of state-mandated horror on such a gargantuan scale. Director Andrzej Fidyk first came to familiarity with the nature of North Korea while making the documentary *The Parade* (1988). It followed a massive celebration for Kim Jong-il featuring 50,000 children performing in perfect regimented harmony. Fidyk was struck by the scale of this propaganda and by the professionalism of its presentation. He wanted to document what was happening inside this country that has been sealed off from the world for decades.

Together with Jung Sung San, a defector trained in North Korean theatrical style, Fidyk creates a large-scale musical based on the stories of seven people. The musical includes both prisoners and guards from Yodok and the result of their collaboration begs description. Those who suffered torture and who lost their families matter-of-factly relate details of life in the camp. During the play's production, they advise on everything from marching formations to the most efficient means of performing mass executions. The adage that truth is always stranger than fiction doesn't quite do the story justice.

The larger political implications are made clear in the film's final coda. With more than 22 million people slowly starving to death, strangers snatching women and children off the street and eating them is not uncommon. But despite the talk about a united country, South Korea, a modern and affluent nation, doesn't have much interest in helping its northern neighbours: people who have never seen a bank machine or used a credit card. With little more than rhetoric about reunification, the only action South Korean people can take is to float balloons across the border, filled with pamphlets and plastic bags. An utter revelation, *Yodok Stories* must be seen to be believed, but even that proves insufficient in the face of the unimaginable reality of life inside North Korea.

Director's Biography

Andrzej Fidyk is a documentary filmmaker, director and screenwriter. He has made over forty documentaries shown by both Polish and British television. Fidyk graduated from the Department Of International Trade Relations in the Warsaw School Of Economics. He first started working for television in 1980, when he found himself one of the finalists of the new producers competition. Since 1982, he has been a member of the Documentary Section of Polish Television. Andrzej Fidyk has won numerous prizes for his work, including the Stanislaw Wyspianski Artistic Youth Award. Since 1996 he has been the director of the Documentary Office of TVP

channel one. He is the creator of many programmes devoted to documentary production in Poland. He marked his film debut with *Gregory Walks Through The Village* (recipient of the Bronze Hobby-Horse at the Cracow Film Festival in 1983) and in 1998 he received the Grand Prix at the European Documentary Week in Strasbourg for his film *Cameramen from Calcutta*.

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